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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 KABUL 000829

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STATE PASS TO USAID FOR AID/ANE, AID/DCHA/DG  
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SUBJECT: SHIA ACTIVIST DESCRIBES IRAN'S EFFORTS TO EXPAND  
INFLUENCE IN AFGHANISTAN

Classified By: DCM Richard Norland for Reasons 1.4 (b) & (d)

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SUMMARY

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11. (C) According to Sayed Jawad Hussein, the leader of a minor political party, "Afghan Youth", Iran is stepping up its efforts to influence the Afghan media, education, and influential Parliamentarians. At least four television stations financed by Iran are scheduled to go on the air in April. Additionally, Iran funds at least ten schools in Kabul, in many instances providing textbooks, the content of which they control. Hussein alleged that several parliamentarians are on the Iranian payroll -- a few maintain houses in Iran or formerly served in the Iranian military. He asserts Iranians are also actively engaged in widespread disinformation campaigns. Hussein was jailed several times for his political activities while living in Iran and is eager to support those who oppose its policies. END SUMMARY

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Iran's Influence in Media Rising  
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12. (C) Hussein explained to POLOFF on March 6 that three television and radio conglomerates in Afghanistan were operated and financed by Iranians. Tamadun ("civilization"), a television station slated to go on the air in April, is staffed by "Sepahi Pasdaran," a unit in the Iranian military which controls the hiring of local staff. Ayatollah Mosseini, a moderate Shia from Kandahar who heads the Arakat Islamic Party, owns the station. The station will have a line-up of "regular" programming; it will not focus solely on religious themes.

13. (C) "Kawsar" (the title of a chapter in the Koran about Mohammed's daughter Fatima) is a television station scheduled to go on the air in April. Its primary content will be religious programming. Ayatollah Taqadusi, a Turkman from Parwan, owns the station and Iran finances approximately 80

percent. The remaining 20 percent comes from donations made by some 400 individuals who regularly attend Friday prayers in Taqadusi's mosque. (Note: Ayatollahs Mosseini, Taqadusi, and Mohaqqueq Kabuli are viewed by the Shia community as their three main leaders. Mosseini and Taqadusi live in Kabul and preach in Mosques in western Kabul. Kabuli lives in Iran. End Note.)

14. (C) According to Hussein, Parliamentarian Haji Mohammed Mohaqqueq, a Hazara Shia from Kabul, is organizing a third television/radio conglomerate, "Fardah" ("tomorrow") with funding from Iran. The Fardah radio station is already on the air, and the television station is scheduled to broadcast beginning in April. Currently the radio only broadcasts in Kabul but has plans to expand. Hussein said that Mohaqqueq received USD 1.3 million from Iran to open the television and radio stations. Another station heavily influenced by Iran that is scheduled to go on the air soon is "Noorin" ("something bright") and is owned by a group of Panjshiris.

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Iran Actively Influencing Educational Sphere  
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15. (C) Ayatollah Mosseini is also in charge of the enormous mosque and madrassa that is being constructed near Parliament. According to Hussein, Mosseini received USD 70 million to build the complex, which includes learning facilities for 400 women and 5,000 men. Housing will be provided for a small number of students. The women's wing is currently occupied, but classes for the men have been delayed for a year while construction is finished on the mosque. According to Hussein, the mosque and the men's school is

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slated to open sometime in 2008. (Note: Between 20-30 percent of the Afghan population is Shia. End Note).

16. (C) Hussein said that roughly ten public schools in Kabul receive significant support from Iran which supplies everything from desks to textbooks. Additionally, he said that Iran has paid to establish three private schools in west Kabul that are slated to open after the new year in April. He added that they are not Madrassas and both boys and girls will attend. The schools have received their license from the Ministry of Education and approximately 1500 students total will be enrolled.

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Iran Allegedly Paying MPs  
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17. (C) According to Hussein, several parliamentarians receive significant amounts of funding from Iran. Hussein named the following MPs: Speaker of the Lower House Yunus Qanooni (a Tajik Sunni); Burhanuddin Rabbani (a Tajik Sunni who is Chair of Legislation Committee); Haji Mohammed Mohaqqueq (a Hazara Shia who is Chair of the Committee on Education, Religion, and Culture); Ustad Mohammed Akbari (a Hazara Shia from Bamyan who is not on any committee); Alami Balkhi (a Hazara Shia from Kabul who is the Chair of the Committee on Justice, Administrative Reform, and Anti-Corruption); Dr. Abdul Qayyum Sajadi (a Hazara Shia from Ghazni who is on the International Relations Committee); and Sayed Mustafa Kazimi (a Tajik Shia who is Chair of the Economy Committee).

18. (C) Hussein said that Kazimi was a former deputy (specifically, second in command) in the Lashkar-e Mohammed Rasulallah, a special military unit in the Iranian army that sends its men to fight in foreign campaigns. Hussein explained that this unit had previously sent fighters to Lebanon, and the unit is composed of mainly Afghans, but there are also Pakistanis and Iraqis in the group. The name of Akbari's political party was originally "Sepahi pasdaran" (named after the special military unit in the Iranian army).

He changed it a few years ago to "National Unity." Hussein said that Akbari has been connected to Iran for over 30 years, and his political party is financed by Iran. He explained that Sajadi owns a home in Qom, where his immediate family lives, and he returns there every Parliamentary recess. Hussein said that Akbari and Sajadi both regularly pass information on the Parliament to Iran. Balkhi owns a publication called "The Way To Survive." Hussein said that it is financed by Iran, and the GOI instructs Balkhi on what articles to publish.

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Iran Engages in Disinformation Campaigns  
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19. (C) Hussein said that Iran actively engages in disinformation campaigns in Afghanistan. He said, for example, that the allegations about Iranian special forces patrolling the streets of Kabul looking for Americans to kidnap in retribution for the Iranians that were taken from the Iranian Embassy in Baghdad was disinformation that was deliberately sold to the U.S. military by Iranian agents.

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COMMENT  
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110. (C) Hussein's observations track with concerns expressed to the Embassy by Information and Culture Minister Khoram with regard to Iran's efforts to exert cultural influence on Afghan audiences in the relative vacuum left by three decades of war and political turmoil. Khoram flatly fears Iranian "cultural imperialism." That Iran is

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augmenting these efforts with covert activities is also incontrovertible. Interest and even pressure from Iran is growing, but thus far it appears to be within the bounds of what passes for "normal" conduct between these historically uneasy neighbors. END COMMENT.

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Biographic Note  
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111. (C) Hussein is a Shia who previously lived in Iran for 25 years. During his last three years of residence in Qom he was imprisoned six times for his political activities for periods of 10-15 days. Hussein said that the only reason he was not killed was thanks to the UNHCR, and therefore he is happy to cooperate with the U.S., because he sees the U.S. as supportive of the UNHCR. Hussein founded his political party "Afghan Youth" five years ago, and its platform includes anti-Iran rhetoric. During his meetings with PolOff, he suggested several times that the U.S. and the international community should be doing more to combat Iran's growing influence in Afghanistan. He is one of the few Shias PolOff has met who takes an open anti-Iran stance and publicly speaks out against the Iranian government.

NEUMANN